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# 2014 Arkansas Report Card

Gary Ritter

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# 2014

## Arkansas Report Card



UNIVERSITY OF  
ARKANSAS

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
& HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Office for  
Education  
Policy



# Letter from the Director

To our readers,

The Office for Education Policy is pleased to bring you its 2014 Arkansas Report Card highlighting our students' educational performance through the 2013-2014 academic year. We hope that this year's edition is informative and helpful in furthering the conversation that surrounds our education system. The following data are intended to provide a snapshot of K-12 education in our state, and inform the discussion as important decisions are being made this legislative session. Although there are many bright spots across the state, it is important for our policymakers, administration, and educators to monitor and adjust based upon current trends and student performance measures at both the state and national level. Thank you,

*Dr. Gary Ritter,  
Director of the Office for Education Policy*



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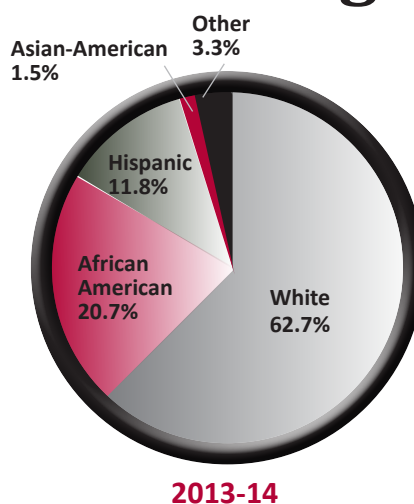
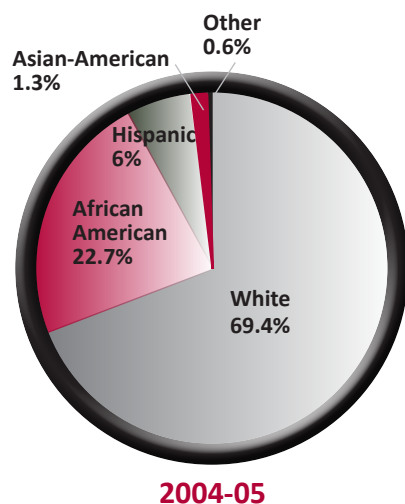
# State Profile



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## K-12 Enrollment Demographics



Arkansas' K-12 Enrollment

2013-2014 | **474,995**

2004-2005 | **455,515**

**+4% Change**



# Executive Summary

Arkansas is entering a new phase for K-12 education. All students in Arkansas public schools are now being taught new standards, and this spring students in grade 3-11 are planning to take new assessments. Changing the standards taught and how student performance is measured is difficult, but Arkansas is committed to preparing students to leave the K-12 school system ready for college and careers.

In addition to administering new assessments, this spring schools are going to be 'graded' on their performance. Intended to help parents better understand how their local schools are performing, the **A-F grades** (page 5) include a wider set of criteria than the prior school rating system and provide meaningful measures for parents and stakeholders.

**As we reflect on Arkansas K-12 performance, there are several areas of success to highlight:**

- **Pre-Kindergarten:** In national reports, Arkansas gets high marks for access to, spending on and quality of pre-kindergarten programs (page 6).
- **High School Graduation Rates** are above the national average and continuing to increase (page 12).
- **Education funding** is consistently supported in the state budget, and progressive for regions in need of support (page 13).
- **ACT scores in English, reading and science** are closing in on national averages, and almost all Arkansas high school graduates are taking the test (page 15).

**Of course, there are also areas for improvement:**

- **Math and literacy proficiency rates on state assessments have been stagnant or declining** over the past three years (page 6). The declining results could be due to the mis-alignment between the new standards and the old assessment (ACTAAP), but student performance has also declined on the ITBS (page 8).
- **The achievement gap** between students who participate in the Free/Reduced Lunch program and their peers who do not, is relatively unchanged over the past several years (page 9).
- Arkansas continues to **lag behind the national average** for 4th and 8th grade students as measured by the NAEP (page 10), and for high school students taking the ACT (page 15).

Pre-kindergarten and high school completion targets are examples of policies that have made a real difference to Arkansas students. The continuing financial support of the K-12 education provides Arkansas students the opportunities to learn and grow every day. While students have demonstrated increased performance on standardized assessments overall, for the past several years there has been little growth and the achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students persist. Moreover, there are several schools around the state that continue to struggle to serve students year after year. Simply put, education leaders need to do better for the students who need school the most.

New and innovative models for teaching and learning should be implemented and rigorously evaluated for their impact on student achievement. Effective school leadership and quality classroom teachers are critical to student success, and we need to continue to support the development and retention of quality educators. Changes in state assessments may make it more challenging to measure student progress and track the effectiveness of the K-12 education system, so it is important that stakeholders use a variety of methods to monitor student progress. By working together to discover the path to success for each and every student, educators and policy makers will ensure Arkansas students are ready for college and careers!



# Making the Grade A-F

This spring, Arkansas schools will be assigned a letter grade based on the performance of their students. The results of the 2013 passage of Act 696, the letter grades are intended to clarify school ratings for parents. Just like the letter grades that students receive from their teachers, the overall grade is the combination of several different scores.

## There are four key parts to the new A-F school grading system



### Student performance on state

**assessments:** Schools are awarded points for student performance: Better performance is worth more points!

Below Basic	= 0.00 pts
Basic	= 0.25 pts
Proficient	= 1.00 pts
Advanced	= 1.25 pts

### Are student groups meeting

**performance targets?** Points assigned for how many of the targets are met—

- Overall Literacy Proficiency
- TAGG (At Risk Students) Literacy Proficiency
- Overall Math Proficiency
- TAGG (At Risk Students) Math Proficiency
- Overall Graduation Rate
- TAGG (At Risk Students) Graduation Rate

### Are there large performance gaps between students who are at risk and those who are not?

Compares the performance of at risk students on literacy and math to students who are not at risk. Schools with larger than expected gaps have points subtracted and schools with smaller than expected gaps have points added to their score.

### Are students graduating and are there large gaps in graduation rates between students who are at risk and those who are not? (Applies only to schools with graduation rates)

Compares the graduation rates of at risk students to students who are not at risk. Schools with larger than expected gaps have points subtracted and schools with smaller than expected gaps have points added to their score.



# District Status

Districts are not assigned letter grades but are assigned a label of **Achieving** (7 districts) or **Needs Improvement** (241 districts). This label is determined by measuring district success at meeting annual performance targets for student proficiency and graduation rate.

**In 2014, seven districts were identified as Achieving:**

Norfolk School District

Responsive Ed Solutions Northwest

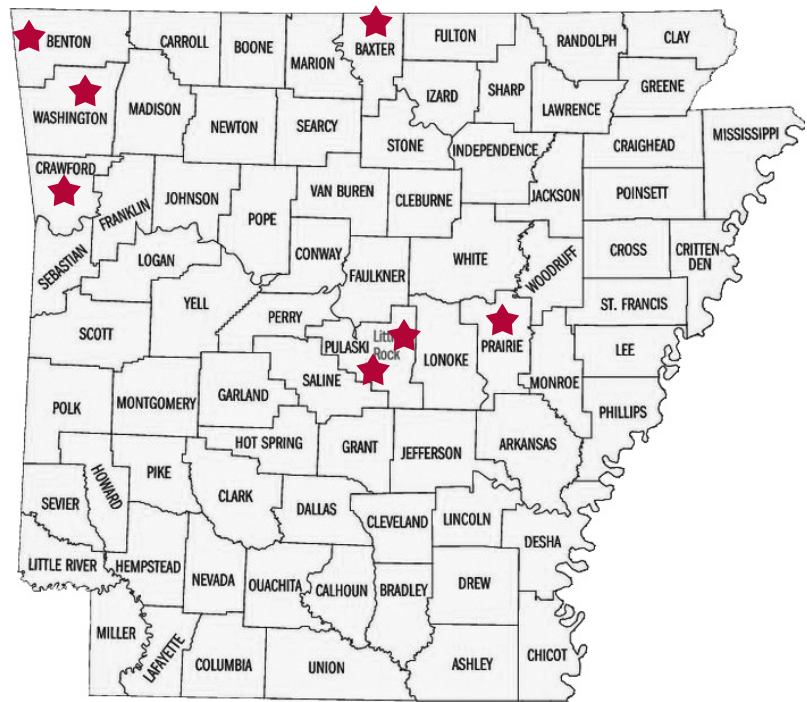
Cedarville School District

Des Arc School District

Academics Plus School District

eStem Public Charter School

Haas Hall Academy



## Getting Started Right!

Arkansas ranks **first in the nation in the percentage of students attending full-day pre-school**, and ranks in the top 10 for early education overall according to *Education Week's* Quality Counts report. In addition, Arkansas received a \$60 million grant to expand pre-kindergarten services in 10 of the state's highest-need, most underserved counties. To read more about Pre-Kindergarten in Arkansas, see our [Policy Brief about National and State Research on Pre-Kindergarten](#).



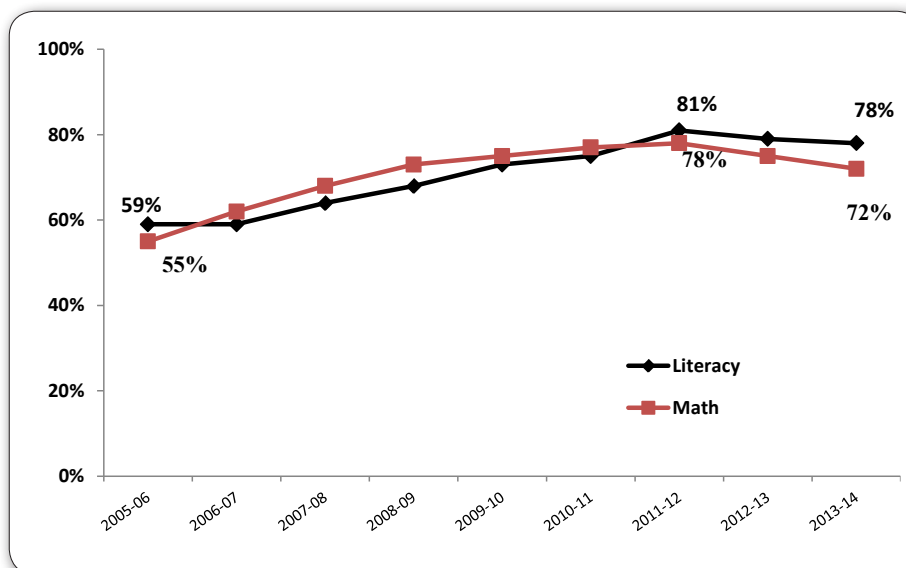


# Benchmark Exam

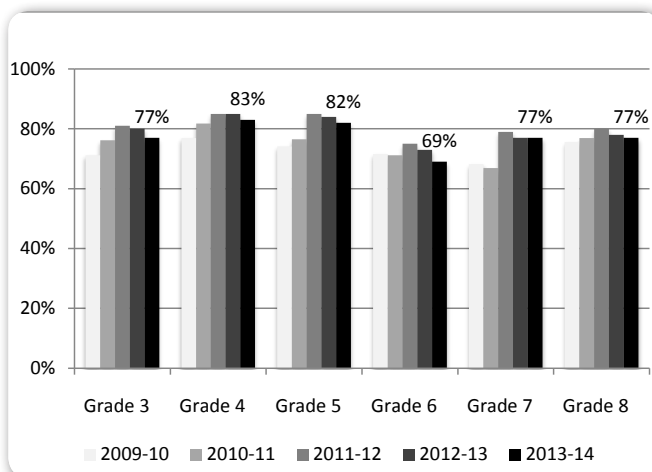


The Arkansas Comprehensive Testing Assessment and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) “Benchmark exams” measure student performance on Arkansas’ state standards. This criterion-referenced assessment is administered to students in grades 3 through 8 each year in the spring. Proficiency rates have increased significantly over the past 10 years. In 2013-14, however, **literacy and math proficiency rates declined**. Statewide, proficiency rates are higher in literacy than in math. Examined by grade level, proficiency rates declined or remained consistent. For an expanded look at this test and the others that Arkansas students take, take a look at our policy brief: [2013-14 Arkansas Test Results](#).

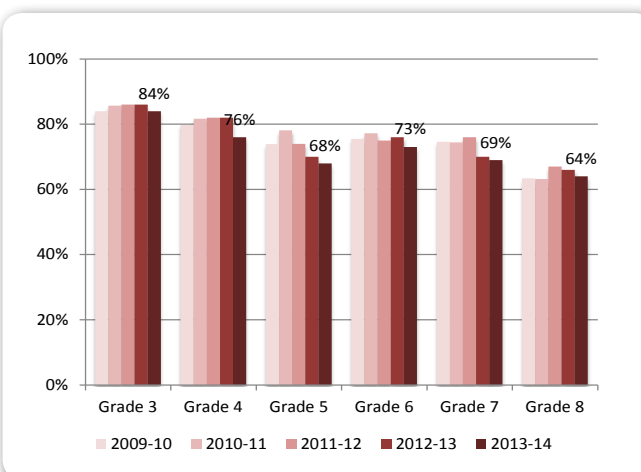
## Statewide Benchmark Exam 2005-2014 Percent Proficient & Advanced



## Arkansas Benchmark **Literacy**: 2009-2014 Percent Proficient & Advanced by Grade



## Arkansas Benchmark **Math**: 2009-2014 Percent Proficient & Advanced by Grade





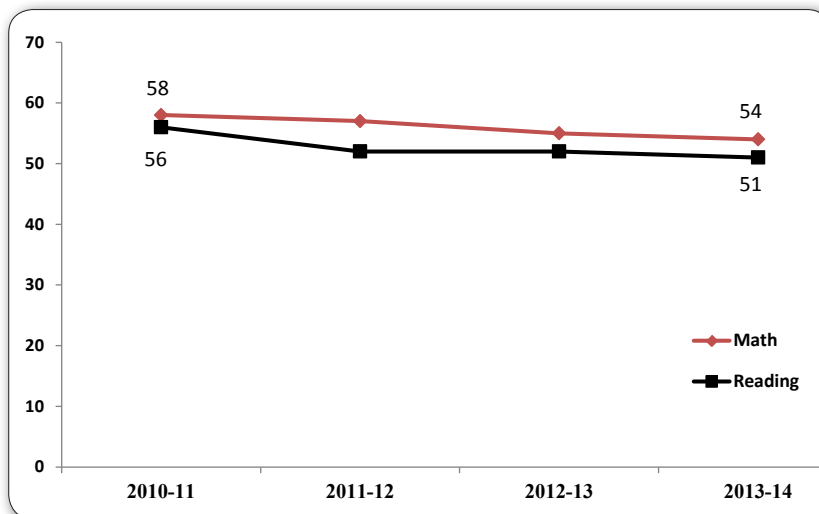
# Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)

The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is administered to students in grades 1 - 9. These norm-referenced questions allow for comparison across state borders using National Percentile Ranks (NPR).

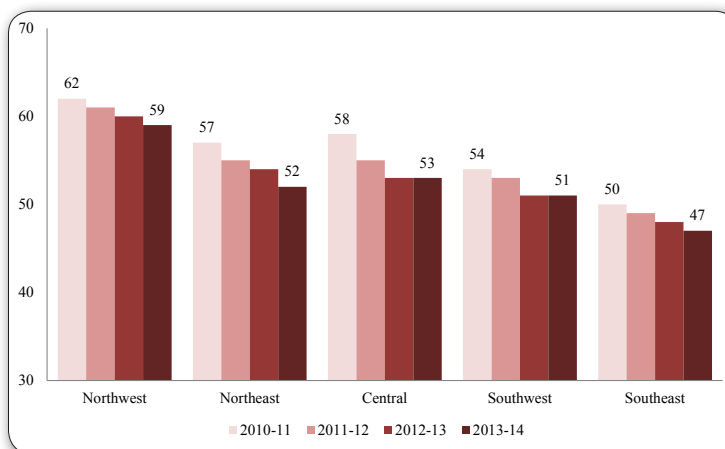
In 2013-14, Arkansas students continued to score above the national average on the ITBS, but **scores in both reading and math have declined consistently** since 2010-11. This declining performance is consistent across all regions of the state. In contrast to the Benchmark results, which show Arkansas students performing higher in Literacy than in math, on the ITBS Arkansas students perform better in mathematics than in reading. For an expanded look at this test and others that Arkansas students take, take a look at our policy brief:

[2013-14 Arkansas Test Results.](#)

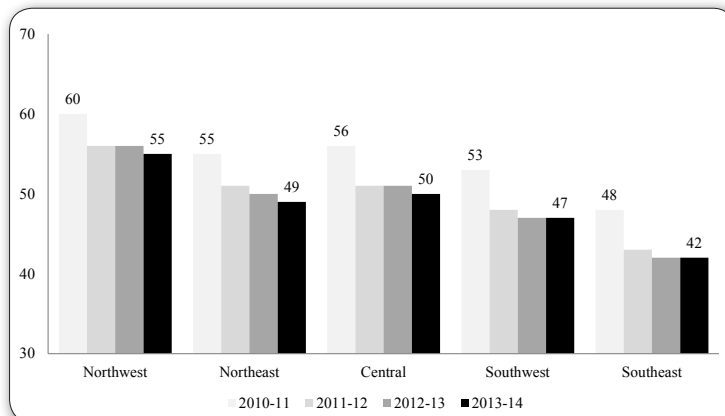
**ITBS National Percentile Rank Statewide 2010-2014**



**ITBS Math: National Percentile Rank by Region, 2010-2014**



**ITBS Reading: National Percentile Rank by Region, 2010-2014**



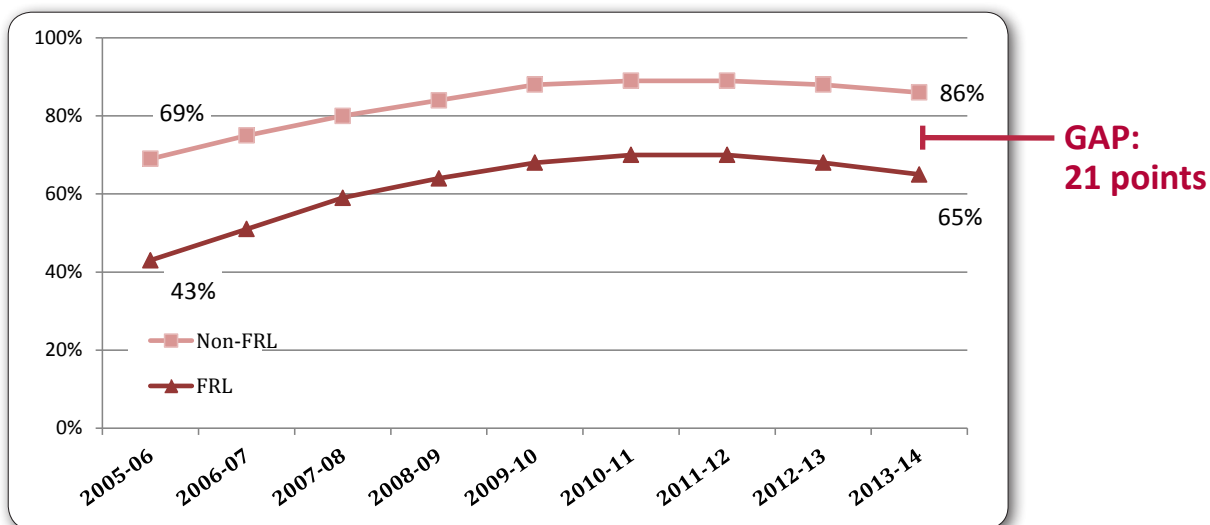
# Closing the GAP



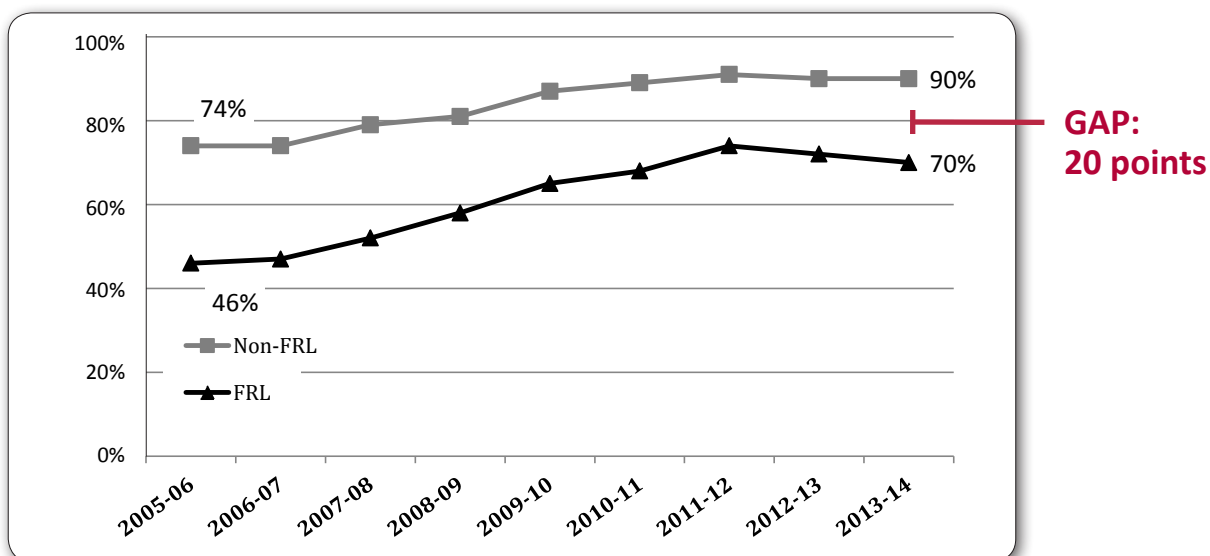
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The academic performance of students who face economic challenges has increased over the last decade, but the gap between those students and their peers who are not eligible for Free/Reduced lunch programs has proven difficult to close. Students have made substantial gains in Benchmark proficiency rates in both literacy and math since 2005-06, and students eligible for Free/Reduced lunch programs are scoring proficient at rates similar to non-FRL students from 2005-06. Growth across both student groups, however, **has not significantly impacted the achievement gap**, which has been holding around 20 percentage points for several years.

**Arkansas Benchmark Math: 2009-2014**  
**Percent Proficient & Advanced by Free/Reduced Lunch Status**



**Arkansas Benchmark Literacy: 2009-2014**  
**Percent Proficient & Advanced by Free/Reduced Lunch Status**





# NAEP Performance

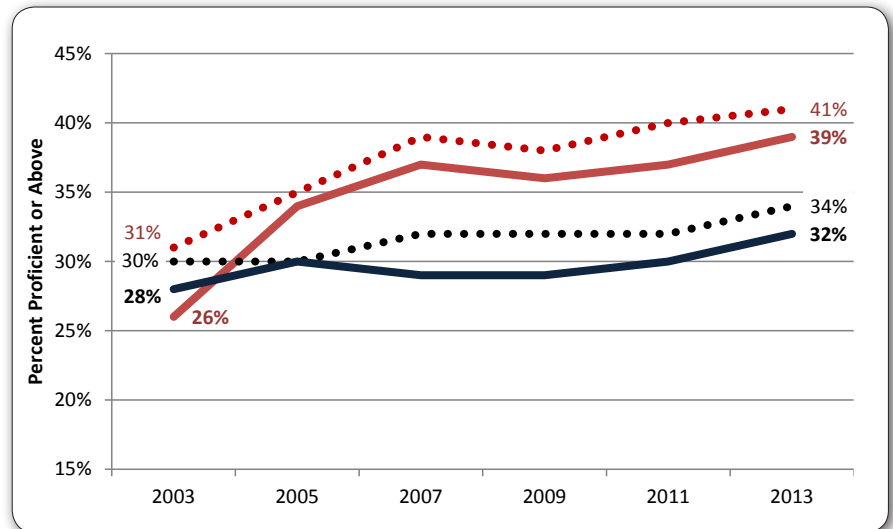
Every two years, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test is administered to a representative sample of students in each of the 50 states plus Washington, D.C. For this reason, this test is known as the **“Nation’s Report Card.”** Administered at the 4th and 8th grade levels, these results can help us track how Arkansas performs against the nation as a whole.

Arkansas students **consistently perform below the national average** on the NAEP, although 4th grade performance is closer to the average than 8th grade performance. Additionally, Arkansas students score closer to the national average in reading than in math.

Arkansas’ 4th grade students scored 2 percentage points below the national proficiency rate in both reading and math in 2013, the most recent year that NAEP was administered. Arkansas’ 8th grade students scored 4 percentage points lower than the national average in reading, and 6 percentage points below in math.

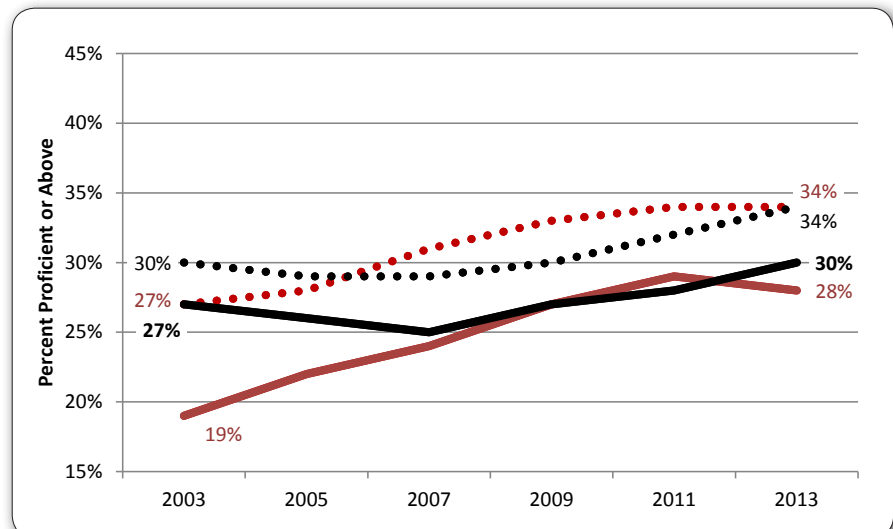
While the reading performance gap between Arkansas students and the national average has remained consistent since 2003, Arkansas students in both 4th and 8th grade have closed the performance gap for math by a few percentage points over the last decade.

**NAEP Grade 4 2003-2013**



•••• Math-US      •••• Reading-US  
— Math-AR      — Reading-AR

**NAEP Grade 8 2003-2013**



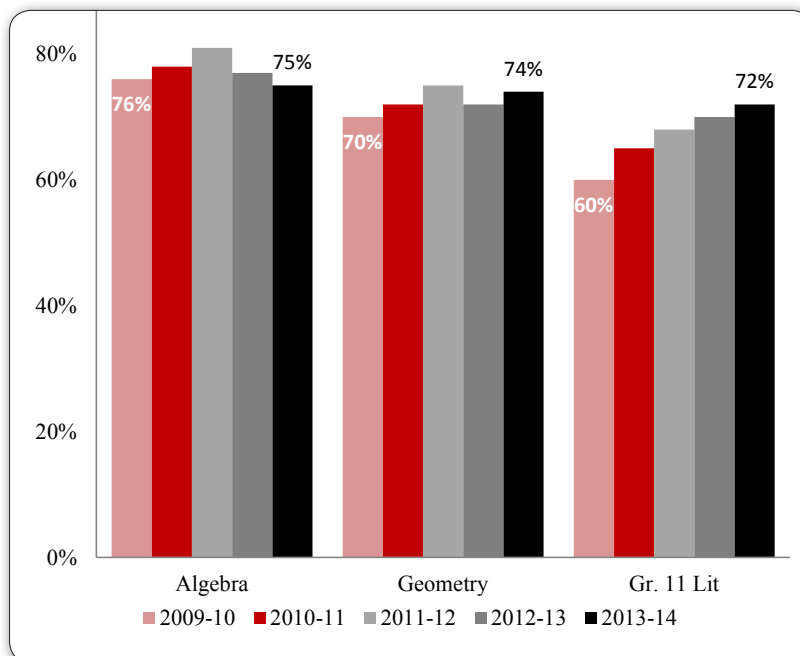
# End of Course Exams



As “capstone tests” for Arkansas high school students, End-of-Course (EOC) examinations test proficiency in key subjects, including Algebra, Geometry, and 11th grade Literacy. These assessments are the last required academic performance evaluation of students before they leave the Arkansas K-12 system.

In the 2013-14 school year, test results were mixed, as 11th grade Literacy scores demonstrated consistent gains, geometry scores increased over the prior year, and Algebra proficiency was at the lowest level since 2009-10.

## Arkansas End-of-Course Exams % Proficient & Advanced by Course, 2009-2014

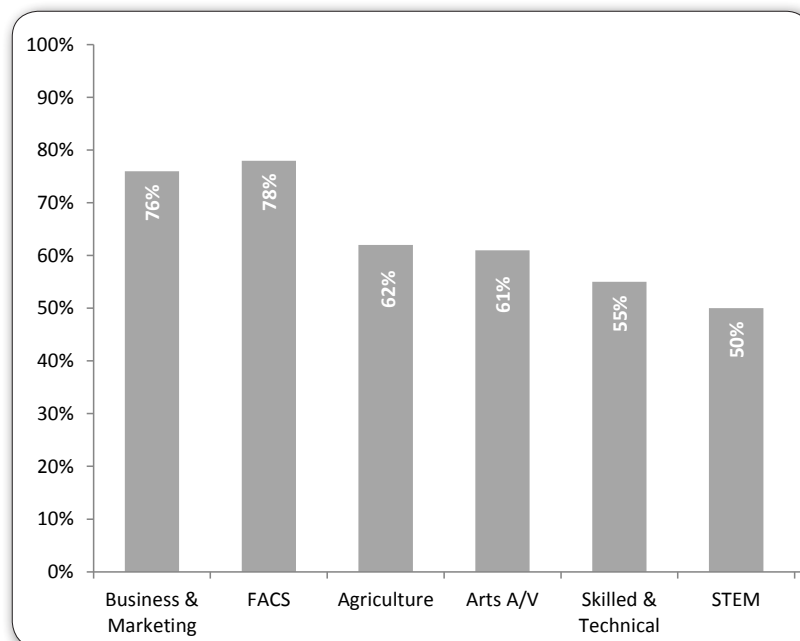


## Career & Technical Exam

All core courses in each of the CTE programs of study conducts end-of-course assessment which measures technical skill attainment as required by the federal Perkins Act. In 2013-14 over 100,000 CTE exams were completed, with the largest percentage of assessments in Business and Marketing (44%) and Family and Consumer Science (35%).

Statewide, **73% of students scored proficient on CTE exams**. Over 75% of students met proficiency expectations on the most common exams (B&M and FACS), while only half of the 1,151 students who completed a STEM assessment were proficient.

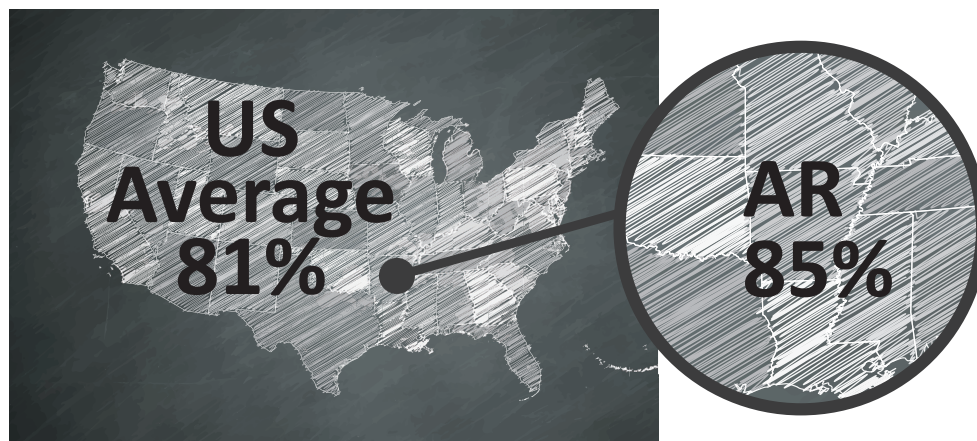
## CTE End-of-Course Assessment Proficiency 2013-2014





# Graduation Rates

High school graduation is a key milestone in students' transition to college and careers, and the major finish line for our K-12 school system. Over the past three years, since our state has begun calculating four-year cohort graduation rates, **Arkansas graduation rates have been steadily climbing**, across all regions and across all demographic groups. More information about this issue can be found in our [Arkansas Education Report Graduation Rates in Arkansas](#).



Four-Year cohort high school graduation rates for the nation, Arkansas & bordering states

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
US	79%	80%	81%
AR	81%	84%	85%
LA	71%	72%	74%
MS	75%	75%	76%
OK	—	—	85%
MO	81%	84%	86%
TN	86%	87%	86%
TX	86%	88%	88%

*Note: Oklahoma did not calculate cohort graduation rates until 2012-13*

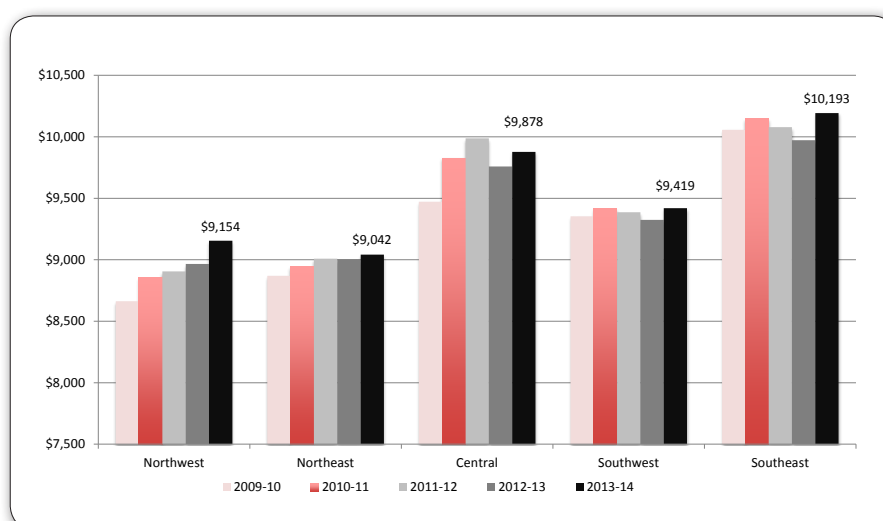


# Arkansas K-12 School Finance

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Arkansas is earning high marks from national reports for its investment in education. With any investment it is important to review the trends over time. **Arkansas' per pupil expenditure for 2013-14 was \$9,457.** This represents a modest increase of \$345 (3.8%) since 2009-10. Per pupil expenditures for each region are represented in the graph below. The southeast region of the state consistently spends more per pupil than other regions, while the northeast reported the lowest spending in 2013-14.

**Per Pupil Expenditure by Region 2009-10 to 2013-14**



Regional differences are reflected in other areas aside from per pupil expenditure. Average classroom teacher salary is consistently higher in the northwest and central regions of the state, as are teacher to student ratios. Percentage of economically disadvantaged students (as measured by participation in Free/Reduced price lunch programs) is lower in the northwest and central regions.

**At A Glance: Regional Financial Highlights 2013-14**

	Northwest	Northeast	Central	Southwest	Southeast
Average Mills	38.22	36.26	39.93	36.72	36.07
% Minority	30%	28%	44%	44%	52%
% Free/ Reduced Lunch Participants	58%	67%	56%	68%	73%
Per Pupil Expenditure	\$9,154	\$9,042	\$9,878	\$9,419	\$10,193
Average Teacher Salary	\$49,951	\$44,739	\$51,529	\$42,725	\$42,053
Teacher: Student Ratio	1 to 14.2	1 to 13.8	1 to 14.3	1 to 12.7	1 to 12.6



# "Cost of Proficiency"

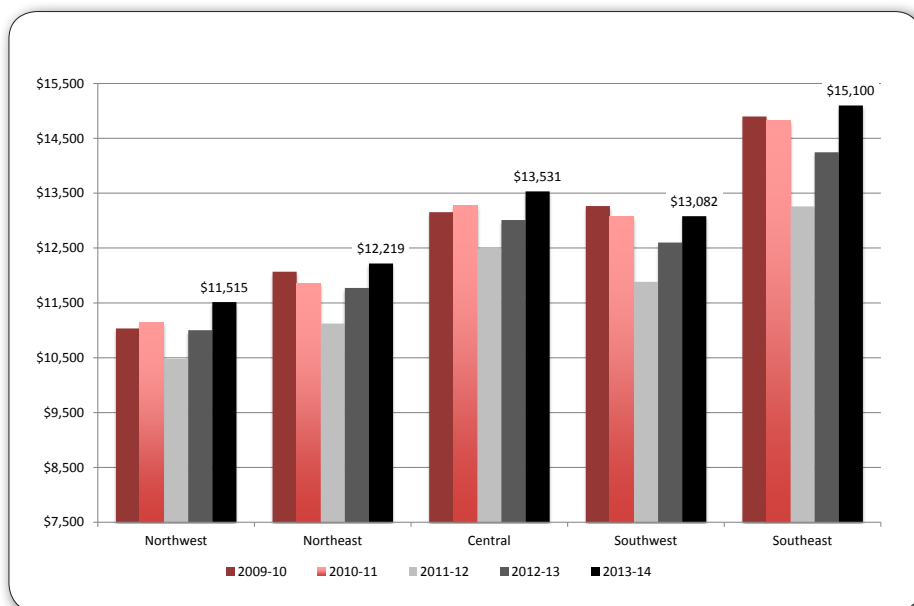
## What is the "Cost of Proficiency"?

Examining investments in our students in conjunction with the outcomes those investments produce provides a measure of the efficiency of Arkansas' public school system. The "Cost of Proficiency" is a representation of the investment associated with students meeting the Proficient or Advanced standard on the Arkansas Benchmark exams. The average regional per pupil expenditure is divided by the regional percent proficient in literacy and math. The "Cost" of each proficient score was lowest in 2011-12: expenditures were similar to previous year, but proficiency rates were at their peak.

**Statewide, the cost of a proficient score in 2013-14 was \$12,609.** "Cost of Proficiency" for each region is represented in the graph below. The southeast region of the state consistently spends more per proficient pupil than other regions, while the northeast reported the lowest spending in 2013-14.

As with per pupil expenditures, student demographics and teacher salaries, there are regional differences in this measure. Students who are economically disadvantaged, English language learners, or have with a learning disability may require greater investment to attain grade-level proficiency. This measure is most informative when comparing across years for a particular region, or between districts with similar student populations.

## 'Cost of Proficiency' by Region 2009-10 to 2013-14



At A Glance: Regional Overall Percent Proficient 2013-14	
Northwest	79.5%
Northeast	74.0%
Central	73.0%
Southwest	72.0%
Southeast	67.5%

$$\text{Cost of Proficiency} = \frac{\text{Per Pupil Expenditure}}{\text{Overall Percent Proficient}}$$

# ACT College Readiness

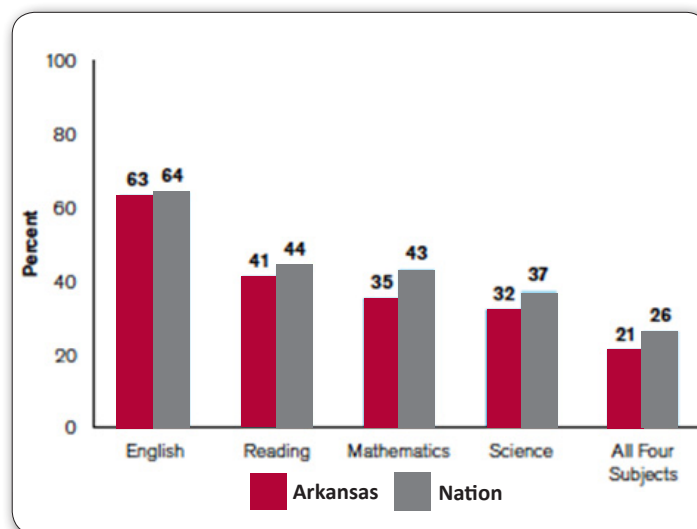


Almost all Arkansas High School graduates (93% of the class of 2014) voluntarily take the ACT near the end of their high school career. The ACT tests four subject areas: English, Reading, Math and Science. Typically taken by students on a college-going path, nationally 57% of students complete the ACT. It is exciting that more Arkansas students are taking the ACT than ever before, and even more impressive that **Arkansas' composite score reached a 5 year high in 2014 of 20.4.**

ACT College Readiness Benchmarks were developed to provide students and their parents with information about the likelihood that students are ready to be successful in college. Sixty-three percent of Arkansas students met the benchmark for English, just one point shy of the national average. Arkansas' largest gap compared to national performance was in mathematics, where only 35% of students met the benchmark.

It is difficult to directly compare Arkansas' performance on the ACT to national performance because a greater percentage of Arkansas students live in poverty and a greater percentage of Arkansas students take the ACT. When compared to national averages, however, Arkansas students are closing the gap on ACT scores. The graph below shows Arkansas' gap compared to the national average in 2010 and 2014. The subject area where the gap is the largest and most persistent is math, while the English gap has decreased by half over the last four years.

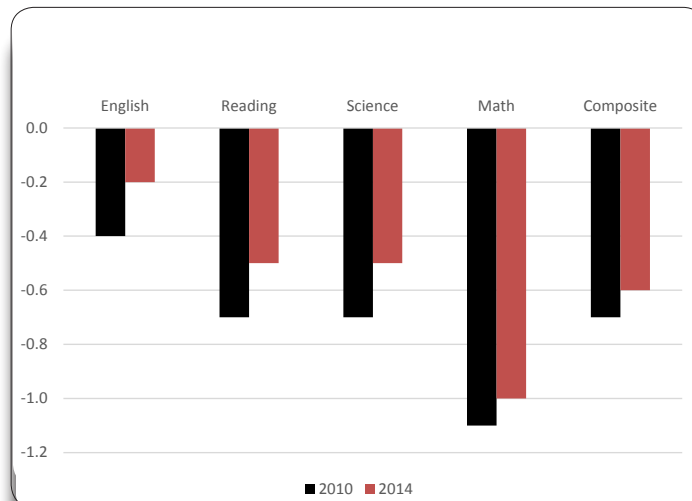
**Percent of 2014 ACT-Tested High School Graduates Meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks by Subject**



**Average ACT Score: Arkansas 2014**

English	Reading	Math	Science
20.1	20.8	19.9	20.3

**Arkansas vs. US ACT Score GAP 2010 and 2014**





# Information & Staff



## **Mission:**

*The Office for Education Policy (OEP) provides relevant education research, data, and policy analysis to support data-driven decision-making for Arkansas PK-12 policymakers and educators.*

## **Do you want to learn more?**

Please e-mail or give us a call. We hope you find this edition of the State Report Card helpful. We appreciate your support and interest in the students of Arkansas!

All graphs and tables used in this publication come from publicly-available data.

## **Sources:**

*ACT.org  
Arkansas Department of Education  
Arkansas Department of Higher Education  
Arkansas Realtors Association  
Bureau of Labor Statistics  
Census.gov  
Fortune.com  
Institute of Education Sciences  
U.S. News and World Report*

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